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Young people’s perspectives on what helps them  
stop offending

*A report from participatory research*

*By*

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## **Acknowledgements**

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## Executive Summary

HMI Probation (2011) found that that not enough attention has been given to the planning, delivery, and evaluation of interventions that tackle offending behaviour, suggesting that Youth Offending Teams need to access and make more use of information about what works in making interventions more effective and that better case planning is needed, together with training and development for practitioners. There is very little evidence of why particular interventions work and also a need for high quality research on ‘offenders’ views on what helped or hindered them in giving up crime’ (Sapouna 2011: 43).

This research therefore aimed to:

- build on existing understanding of what works in reducing reoffending
- conduct participatory research to explore the relevance of these studies in the context of the lived experiences of young people in contact with YOT;
- understand from young people’s perspectives why particular interventions may work;
- make recommendations regarding YOT practice as appropriate.

The research was carried out by Cath Larkins and John Wainwright at The Centre for Children and Young People’s Participation at the University of Central Lancashire School of Social Work.

A literature review was presented to a core group of four young people in custody. They reflected on the themes in existing research and their own experience. They then developed participatory research activities. The researchers conducted these activities with a further 46 young people in contact with YOT. The research will be followed by an action planning process to consider how any strategic developments emerging from report might be implemented.

## The Research Findings

### ***Respectful, empathic relationships between YOT workers and young people***

*‘if you don't get on with your YOT worker it's not going to work out... if I didn't get along with [my worker] I wouldn't turn up for my meetings I'd probably still be getting in trouble but because I get along with her. She's, it's helping me out a lot more, I can talk to her basically.’*

This research confirms the findings of the Centre for Social Justice Review (2012), indicating positive relationships between young people and YOT workers are central. Relationships could enable young people to engage, reflect and change.

*‘Putting, just putting me on the right track really instead of like, say ....I'd come in, I'd, I'd express my feelings, I'd write them down on a piece of paper, I'd do a plan of what I'd done and what crime I'd committed, why I'd committed the crime, what prevented, what, what led me to doing the crime and what could have resourced me to, from doing the crime, so.’*

Positive relationships could be built through YOT workers spending time with young people, engaging in activities with young people and developing trust through clarity about roles and confidentiality.

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### **Engaging with family**

*‘if your YOT worker gets on well with your parents ...then you, you form a bond, it's like that trust circle in'it? It opens up a bit more because you think well yeah, my parents trust them maybe I can trust them that little bit more. And if, if they get on well and they're chatting and that then it's like it's a good thing because then it makes you feel better about yourself. ‘*

Developing positive relationships with parents was seen as equally helpful in reducing offending. Despite Centre for Social Justice (2012) concern that in some areas of England the quality of YOT worker relationships with families as being ‘entirely neglected’, we found repeated examples of positive engagement with families in this local authority. However, there were examples of such relationships not being developed. Learning from some young people’s experience of good practice where it occurred, it is clear that positive relationships can be built with families where workers help families to manage emotions, stress and boundaries, where workers communicate openly, are friendly and relaxed. In some cases a mediation approach may be useful. It is also essential that young people should be able to influence how (and whether) these relationships with wider family members are built.

*‘[Workers should get on]...with me basically. And they move on to them, yeah, from me to them, yeah.’*

*‘She comes inside my house and it's like just a mate's came in and, do you know? . . . And she just sits around and talks and it's really nice.’*

### **Structure and Routine**

*‘they are nice people and that, and they just, I don’t know ... I had targets set out for me and I had to achieve. That was with (Worker 1) and that, for like cutting down on the weed. And then with (Worker 2)I had targets to keep myself busy and stuff, like just playing football, just not hanging around with them kind of people.’*

Having a support from YOT to establish structure and routine was seen to reduce offending by all but a small minority of young people. Routine seemed to provide a focus and purpose to their daily lives, helping them establish a positive pattern of behaviour on a daily basis. This in turn would enable them to have a much better chance of not having the time, or the inclination, to get involved in behaviours that may lead to offending. Fixed appointments, activities and offence focused programmes had enabled them to concentrate on the positive opportunities in their lives. Supporting young people to develop hobbies was recurrently seen as an important way in which YOT could support young people to develop structure in their lives.

*‘I've stuck at the boxing I've been training at it and...it's really good. Like they, they tried getting me on to, another boxing course ...it's opened the doors a bit more into like giving myself summat to do, getting a lot of anger out and stuff like that, so it's, it's give me a new release like, sort of summat to keep myself out of trouble and, and a reason to, to do summat with my life because you wake up, say you do some training and then you feel right happy,’*

### **Practical Help**

*'because some people don't even know what they're entitled to. I don't know what I'm fully entitled to at the moment so you should know like what you're entitled to and how it's all going to work and stuff like that.'*

Practical help with housing and money was important for around two-thirds of the young people who considered these themes. YOT workers could provide assistance by having a good knowledge and network of available housing in the area for young people who have offended. YOT workers also could provide support by being able to navigate the complex relationship between benefits, housing and employment for many of the young people that attend YOTS. Practical help of these kinds enabled young people to get out of crises situations at critical times in their lives and enabled them to focus on attending YOT. Providing practical help of this kind also enabled YOT workers to build a relationship of trust and reciprocity whilst addressing young people's offending behaviour.

### **Health and Emotional Wellbeing**

*'Like, it's like a drug and alcohol thing that,..., if you go to them you can like get massages and that, and that, you get a worker and like they'll tell you like, what like, if it's drug you're taking, tell you like what it does to you and all that, like try and stop you.'*

Young people associated reducing drug and alcohol misuse with reducing offending and many were receiving positive interventions and support in this area. YOT workers could support reduced use by making referrals to services, but also by praising young people when they succeed in order to maintain motivation to stop. Counselling was less widely discussed, but around half of the young people identified a role for this sort of emotional support, either from YOT or from specialist workers and local services.

*'I don't know like, sometimes like you can say to a YOT worker, yeah, yeah, yeah, I'm fine but really you're not, like you want, in a way you kind of want someone to recognise it, the health services would recognise it'*

Specialist services needed to be at appropriate times and there were different suggestions about what appropriate venues might be.

### **Education, Training and Work**

*'They helped me get my coaching, coaching qualification and that. . They put me, they put me on a course ..., to do NVQ level one, for football and sport, like gym and that, so done that, then they put me onto another one ... for my FA level one coaching so . . '*

Participation in education and training was a crucial factor in reducing offending. Engagement in learning could be encouraged by focussing on young people's aspirations and hopes for a better future. Less formal settings for education were favoured. There was some frustration about lack of job opportunities however.

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*'going to be hard getting a job these days . . . look at our record, Prison. People say they don't judge you, but they do judge, but you have been in jail and that and they do judge you.'*

### **Role models**

*'[Where I go for education] the staff that they have up there are all people that have, really that have offended and they want to get back and ...the way I see it they've done worse than me when they were my age and they've done something with their life, so if they can do it easy, I should be able to do it. '*

Two thirds of the young people judged mentoring or group meetings with ex-offenders to be just as important as the other aspects of support with practical issues, emotional health and education/employment which form a more routine part of YOT work targeted at reducing offending. There was clearly a need to consider who young people were put in contact with, as this young person explained,

*'meet someone who's robbed a car and been sent down for it, and be like, could wreck everything couldn't it? ...Depends what you come in for doesn't it? What level of crime you're on.*

However meetings with other young people and ex- offenders were seen as a way of increasing motivation or hope, and ending isolation. Young people were concerned however, that they should not be forced to take part in such activities. Three young people who participated in the research volunteered to act as peer mentors.

### **Prison, Restorative Justice and Community Work**

*'yeah, with mine, with mine, what I did, my offence, I've actually, I spoke to [the victim] and she's, she like described it to me. And like I felt really bad about myself, that I made her feel that way. Erm, yeah, but, I think that's how people would benefit from that, I did myself.'*

Around half of the young people who talked about this theme thought that restorative justice could be a useful approach. Those who had experience of the approach tended to acknowledge that meeting their victim had made them think about the impact of their offending behaviour. Young people involved in violent offences were much more reluctant to engage in restorative justice.

Slightly fewer young people favoured community work and suggestions were made for how it could be made less humiliating and more effective. These included making it voluntary and with a specific focus, linked to developing skills for future employment or helping people.

*'it could be like, you could volunteer once a week at say, I don't know, a charity shop, and there, obviously there's a lot of, of YOT kids or they could open a shop, their own charity shop, YOT could open it and all the proceeds go to like a chosen charity at the end of the year'*

The majority saw prison as likely to lead to further reoffending. For the few young people who saw prison as potentially effective in reducing their offending, having a rigid structure and access



to gaining qualification were key.

### **Participatory Strengths-Based Approaches**

*‘Help with learning how to sort out problems. Yeah, help with learning how to sort out problems is a good thing as well because it helps you get it out your head and if you share it, it helps you even more.’*

Over three quarters of the young people who discussed this theme thought being asked what help you need and being given that help would reduce re-offending. Some described being enabled to take a lead in identifying their problems and solutions. For these young people YOT workers who responded to problems which young people identified themselves by providing young people with information, opportunities, transport and support even when they struggled to attend, in addition to the sorts of practical and emotional help already identified above. However, the experiences of different young people revealed discrepancies in practice.

### **Action Planning**

The research has produced a number of recommendations for future practice which will be discussed and refined in the action planning process.

Practice issues are areas where the research suggests there may be discrepancies between workers or teams and that addressing these might lead to greater reduction in re-offending.

Recommendations are suggestions from young people for further developments in YOT service delivery.

### **Consistent Practice Issues**

1. Ensure a consistent approach across the authority to valuing time spent on building trusting, respectful and empathetic working relationships between workers and young people. Recognise that this may require resources to be invested in activities, directed by young people, through which young people and workers can get to know and have confidence in each other.
2. Ensure workers have the time and skills to develop relationships with parents wherever this is appropriate, and guided by the views of the young person. Ensure effective information exchange with families wherever possible and provide support in addressing parenting stress and family problems.
3. Ensure all YOT workers focus on structure and routine in a young person’s life, as a systematic element of their interventions and court orders. Recognise that developing structure may require time and resources for interventions aimed at encouraging young people’s engagement in positive activities.
4. Ensure all YOT workers teach young people about managing their finances when attending the YOT. This would include welfare and housing benefit advice, but must address the wider issues of managing on a limited budget. Recognise workers may need

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time to develop the skills and local knowledge needed to provide this advice, and that connections with other specialist services attending YOT buildings may also be useful.

5. Ensure all YOT workers have awareness of the varied ways emotional distress can manifest; that there are appropriate and varied services to refer to, that these are properly explained to young people; and that workers consistently provide emotional support in the form of encouragement for success.
6. Ensure all YOT workers build a training, education and employment path as part of their work with young people on their YOT orders.
7. Ensure YOT workers in all areas have access to schemes through which young people can meet with ex-offenders; offer this opportunity to all young people.
8. Ensure that all community work programmes provide an opportunity for the young person to develop skills and their self-esteem rather than just as using it as punitive measure. This would involve community work developing young people’s team work and communication skills, but also providing training opportunities in charities, businesses and shops.
9. Develop a consistent policy across the authority about the payment of transport costs for attendance and other activities. Ensure this is followed consistently in all teams.

#### **Recommendations for YOT**

- Consider the need to build into YOT teams work with young people the opportunity to engage with a worker of a similar ethnicity or the same gender. This should be a flexible provision that acknowledges the diversity in young people and the importance that ethnicity and gender has on their identity and their place in the world.
- Consider developing a plan with key recreational facilities in the region – sports centres, gyms, cycle tracks etc - to ensure that all young people have the chance to access and participate in constructive leisure activities whilst attending the YOT.
- Colleges and young person’s education and training centres must provide places on their courses for young people attending YOTs on a mandatory basis. This would mean that every young person who attends a YOT would be guaranteed a place on an education and/or training course. Consider, in discussion with the relevant education services, how this might be implemented.
- Consider setting up a peer-mentoring scheme through which young people can meet in groups with other young people who have successfully stopped offending (following the suggestions for practical details outlined above by young people). Pilot and evaluate this scheme in one area and spread it across the five teams if successful.
- Consider enabling young people to take a greater lead in their engagement in YOT, where possible encouraging them to identify their own problems and potential solutions, then providing the support necessary to make these changes.

**Recommendation for Health Services , Lancashire YPS and Lancashire Sport**

- Counselling and substance misuse services need to be available in young person friendly or non-stigmatising venues close to where they live. Consider developing drop in or self-referral routes, or greater awareness of these if already existing services are available, so that young people can contact services at times of crisis.
- In light of the first recommendation for YOT, above, consider whether health services can help resource young people's access to sporting facilities as a means of improving and maintaining their emotional health.



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## 1. Introduction

HMI Probation (2011) found that that not enough attention has been given to the planning, delivery, and evaluation of interventions that tackle offending behaviour, suggesting that Youth Offending Teams need to access and make more use of information about what works in making interventions more effective and that better case planning is needed, together with training and development for practitioners. There is very little evidence of why particular interventions work and also a need for high quality research on ‘offenders’ views on what helped or hindered them in giving up crime’ (Sapouna 2011: 43).

This research therefore aimed to:

- build on existing understanding of what works in reducing reoffending
- conduct participatory research to explore the relevance of these studies in the context of the lived experiences of young people in contact with YOT;
- understand from young people’s perspectives why particular interventions may work;
- make recommendations regarding YOT practice as appropriate.

The research was led by a core group of four young people, who advised the researchers on research tools and focus. The research was carried out with a further 46 young people across 5 YOT teams.

This report contains four sections.

1. Introduction: focussed on the background literature that was presented to the core group of young people who directed the research
2. Research Process and Participants: outlining the theoretical underpinnings and demographic details of the young people who took part.
3. The Research Findings: divided into nine themes and highlighting significant issues or recommendations in relations to each of these
4. A brief conclusion, with suggestions for ways forward.

### 1.1 Background literature

There have been numerous reviews of the ‘what works’ literature (e.g. Dowden and Andrews, 2004; Lipsey, 1995; 1999; Lipsey and Wilson, 1998; Losel, 1995; McGuire et al., 2002) revealing consistent agreement that crucial factors include ‘careful assessment; use of a risk and protective factors framework; a cognitive skills element; a coordinated multi-modal design; an element of reparation; implementation in accordance with design (‘programme integrity’); and long-term engagement and contact time, particularly for persistent and more serious offenders (Prior and Mason 2010: 213).

The main focus of the literature review below has been to explore research which draws on the perspectives of young service users to identify how the processes might work to reduce their offending. We also exclude literature on reforms in YOS systems.

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### Sentences and programmes

Sapouna’s (2011) review of literature for the Scottish Government identified research evidence that detention can deter some individuals from reoffending, but the personal circumstances of those imprisoned is a significant factor, as detention is more effective for those who have stable relationships or jobs. She also found that longer sentences are associated with higher reoffending rates.

Young people with experience of offending have shown a very nuanced understanding of the contradictory influence custodial sentences can deliver; whilst gaining a qualification in prison might lead to opportunities for young people to turn their lives around, detention could also disrupt young people’s education and housing and possibly result in a greater need for support on release (Cleghorn et al 2011). For the young people involved in Cleghorn et al’s (2011) study, whether or not support was provided in prison or on release was the key feature in whether prison was effective in reducing reoffending. The extent to which fear of going to prison was seen as a deterrent by young people surveyed (User Voice 2011) was very mixed.

Young people however have suggested that ASBOs, fines and tagging are fairly ineffective in reducing reoffending as they do not address the root causes of offending; indeed ASBOs can be seen as a status symbol (Cleghorn et al 2011). Attendance at a Youth Justice Centre, in contrast, was felt to be effective in providing activities and an opportunity to reflect on and change behaviour. Young people have suggested that the effectiveness of restorative justice was perceived as dependent on the nature of the crime committed (ibid), and this is confirmed by systematic evaluations between projects (Shapland, J. et al. 2008) which suggest restorative justice may be seen as effective if sophisticated measures of reduction are used (including the frequency and severity of reoffending).

Low level community sentences are successful in reducing reoffending when compared with high level community sentences (Centre for Social Justice 2012: 3). A meta-analysis of other research suggests that the quality of service within a sanction, rather than a sanction itself, may be the most important factor (Andrews and Bonta, 2010).

### Practical help

The need for practical support (such as help with the issues listed below) has been identified in repeated research (Sapouna, 2011) and confirmed in work on young people’s perspectives (Cleghorn et al, 2011; User Voice 2011; Prior and Mason 2010):

- Help engaging in meaningful activity, education, training and work
- Help with benefits and money
- Help to family and with parenting
- Behavioural therapy, counselling and MH support
- Help with drugs and alcohol
- Help learning how to sort out your own problems
- Help with housing

Underpinning these activities is a common theme of supporting young people to feel part of their community and society. This might involve young people developing more positive relationships

with family, friends, girlfriends, but it also necessitates welcoming attitudes from the communities young people try to engage with (Maruna, 2010) and this requires Probation workers (and we argue YOT workers) to engage with others around the young people they are working with (Shapland et al. 2011; Fraser et al 2010). Engaging in pro-social behaviour, such as getting employment, does however require social capital, that is wider networks of connections and knowledge that provide access to opportunities to engage (McNeil and Whyte 2007).

### Quality of YOT/Probation relationships

The quality of relationships that workers establish with young people who have offended is then a crucial factor (Prior and Mason 2010) in enabling reducing offending programmes to be successful and integration into pro-social behaviour in the community to be possible, particularly for those young people who do not have the social networks or social capital that might support them to turn their lives around unaided.

Young people have identified (Cleghorn et al 2011; User voice 2011; Sapouna 2011; Prior and Mason 2010) that key features in a positive relationship with YOT workers are:

- Being listened to and respected
- Receiving one-to-one YOT worker support
- Continuity of worker who is a stable point of contact
- YOT workers being proactive in providing practical support
- YOT worker support and supervision being sufficiently intensive
- YOT workers providing diversion away from criminal justice system
- Having a worker who young people can speak openly without fear of punishment.

Concern with the quality of relationships between workers and young people is a central feature of the recent literature review which found that 'in many areas the centrality of YOT worker relationships with young people and their families has become entirely neglected.' (Centre for Social Justice, 2012: 99)

Young people have suggested that relationships with YOT workers may also improve if: workers also have an offending history; workers are of the same gender as the young people they are working with; appointments times are negotiated to fit the specific circumstances of individual young people, including home visits (User Voice 2011).

The relationship between workers and young people is at the core of what many practitioners do and is becoming recognised as a key intervention in reducing and preventing offending (Burnett and McNeill, 2005; Edwards et al., 2006). Dowden and Andrews (2004: 205) suggest 'open, warm, enthusiastic communication' is crucial. There is however insufficient research to show how secure relationships between workers and young people can be established, nor the knowledge and skills which make these relationships sustainable (Prior and Mason 2010).

As young people have repeatedly reported lacking positive role models, and because YOT workers cannot be the sole source of the positive relationships a young person may need, mentoring provides another critical avenue through which pro-social behaviour and networks can be supported to develop. Young people have requested mentors who have experience of offending

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(User Voice 2011) and some projects report success in using ‘grandmentors’ to simulate ‘grandparent style’ relationships. Positive role models could also be virtual, as young people have identified the importance of figures in the media who they can identify with as having turned their lives around (Cleghorn et al 2011). Mentoring is especially likely to succeed with young people who are aged less than 19 years and when goals are defined in agreement with service users (Finnegan et al 2010).

### **Strengths based and participatory approaches**

There is some evidence that strength based approaches to desistance are effective and key features of an approach that young people appreciate (Cleghorn et al 2011; User Voice 2011; Sapouna 2011).

Where workers set realistic goals, that reinforce and reward positive behaviours such that the pros of desisting outweigh the cons, offending behaviour appears more likely to change (McMurrin, 2002). This is reinforced where case managers act as positive role models working together with people who have offended (Centre for Social Justice 2010; Healy 2010). Where people do reoffend, fair and proportionate responses are crucial, as is recognition and reward for desistance (Caverley and Farrall 2011), such as ‘sealing of criminal justice records’ or restoring rights earlier than usual (Maruna and Lebel, 2010).

A strengths based approach has been recommended by young people, as they have identified that they only stop offending when they have decided to stop ‘being involved in crime ‘for themselves’. To be in that place they required a degree of material and emotional security.’ (Cleghorn et al. 2011:44). This is confirmed in wider literature (Sapouna, 2011); therefore, motivational approaches that provide hope are more likely to succeed. There is therefore some evidence that service users might then be involved in planning the interventions that are meant to support them in reducing their re-offending, although how this might effectively be achieved needs further research (Sapouna, 2011).

Our research therefore contributes to redressing two gaps in existing research, by providing a methodology for young people’s engagement in YOT service planning, as well as providing insight into young people’s views on what helps stop re-offending and how these interventions might operate.



## 2. Research Process and Research Participants

### 2.1 Research Process

#### Theoretical Foundations

The methodology used sought to maximise the young service users influence over the research processes, within the limits of the research goals and the resources available (Franks 2010). We drew on three theoretical traditions.

A) Participatory reflective action research inspired by Freire (1973) was used to facilitate young people's reflecting on their existing circumstances, identifying where change was needed, and considering what transformation of social and personal conditions could bring about this change.

B) Drawing on some of the thinking of appreciative inquiry (Hammersley 2002) we helped the young people to focus on their experiences of success, which proved an empowering and highly-inclusive approach. This has a clear focus on change, appropriate to practical research aimed at providing specific information to practitioners, and it recognises the potential for young people, as social actors, to bring about change (Hammersley 2002; Reason and Bradbury 2008).

C) A conceptual framework drawn from Realist Evaluation (Pawson and Tilley 1998), was applied at the end of the Participatory Action stage. Young people's own reflections on how the changes they seek might be achieved was supplemented by realist reflection on how different mechanisms, networks and relationships of influence might affect the achievement of the changes they sought (Pawson and Tilley 1998; Larkins forthcoming). This process of analysis will continue through engagement with an adult steering group, to develop an action plan for YOTs to identify achievable strategies for change.

#### In Practice

The researchers worked with the Core Group for five sessions. In the first three sessions young people introduced the themes for discussion from their experience:

- **Being listened to and respected**
- **Help with your hobbies**
- **Helping you get a job**
- **Meetings with other young people and ex-offenders**
- **Structure and routine**
- **Asking you what help you need and giving you that help**
- **Rich people give more money to poor people**
- **Worker doing hobbies with you**
- **YOT worker getting on well with your parents**

Drawing on our verbal summaries of the literature, the core group also confirmed that these issues were important to discuss with other young people who have offended.

- Help with friends and family – parenting skills
- You getting on well with YOT worker
- Help with education or training
- Help with drugs or alcohol

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- Help with learning how to sort out problems
- Mentoring
- Help with benefits or money
- Restorative Justice
- Counselling
- Help with where you live
- Getting a girlfriend
- Prison
- Community work

In the fourth session they developed the interview schedule and game which enabled us to engage other young people in discussion of all of these issues.

In the fifth session, one core group member reviewed the initial findings and suggested key themes to focus on at the analysis stage.

Interviews were held in YOT offices. Young people were selected through a rigorous sampling frame, but additional young people were selected by YOT workers to replace those initially approached who did not wish to participate or who were no longer in contact with the service. Interviews were usually one-to-one, but occasionally involved two or three young people at a time. Interviews were conducted using the participatory activities outlined in appendix 1 and further questions written by the core group.

### *Interpretation of the data*

The data has been loaded into NVivo and analysed using the themes identified by the core group. Findings in relation to direct questions are quantified (that is expressed as descriptive percentages), as the number of interviewees is fairly substantial (46) (Sandelowski 2001). Whilst the sample is not large or rigorously derived as there were substitutions. It none the less represents a substantial 10% of the local authority cohort of young offenders. We suggest that differences in percentages of around 15% may be reasonably reliable indications of differences in priorities for young people. More importantly, the research sought to understand how changes in young people’s offending behaviour could be encouraged. This data is presented as a qualitative exploration of similarities and differences in young people’s experiences and aspirations. Where we use the term ‘a few’ this means 3-5 interviews, ‘several’ means 5-10.

Where direct quotations from young people are used, we refer only to their age (in a two year age range) and gender. This approach aims to protect confidentiality, as details such as ethnicity and sentence/programme risked revealing their identities to workers within the YOT, who facilitated their participation.

## **2.2 Research Participants**

In total the research involved 50 young people their broad demographic characteristics are depicted in the charts below.

Figure 1 shows the research participants were aged 11 to 17 years old. Mirroring the cohort, this gives 86% of participants in the 15-18 year range, but with a slight (2-4%) over representation of 17 year olds and under representation of 16 year olds.

**Fig 1**

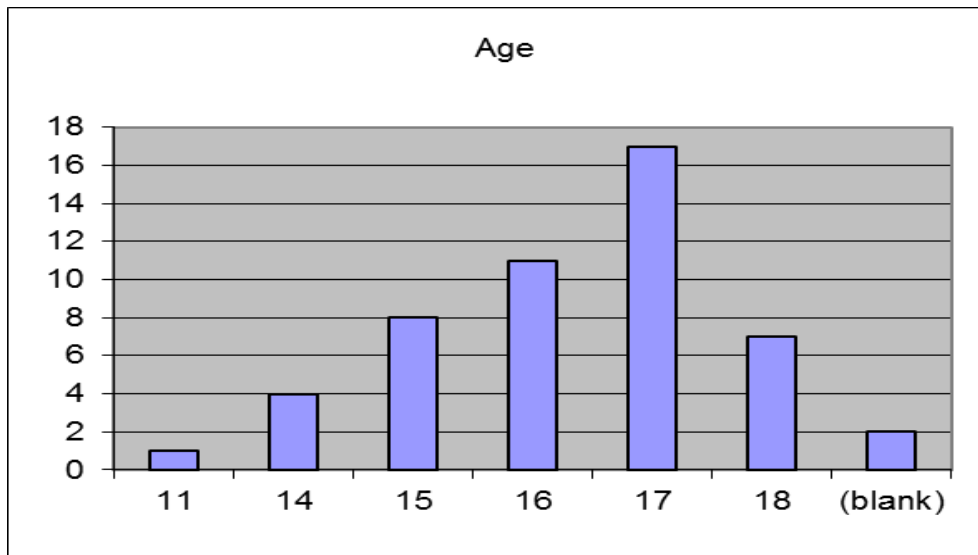
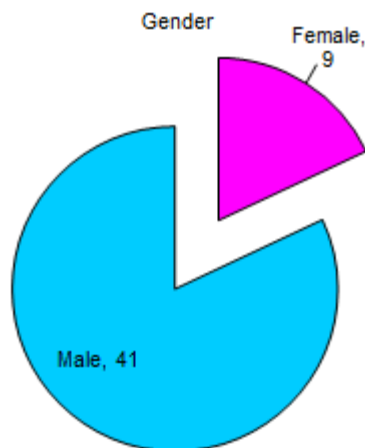


Figure 2 show the gender balance of the sample, in which 82% were male. This represents a 6% higher proportion of females than the in the cohort at the time of sampling, but reflects our aim to ensure a strong female presence in the second stage of data collection as no young women took part in the direction of the project through the core group.

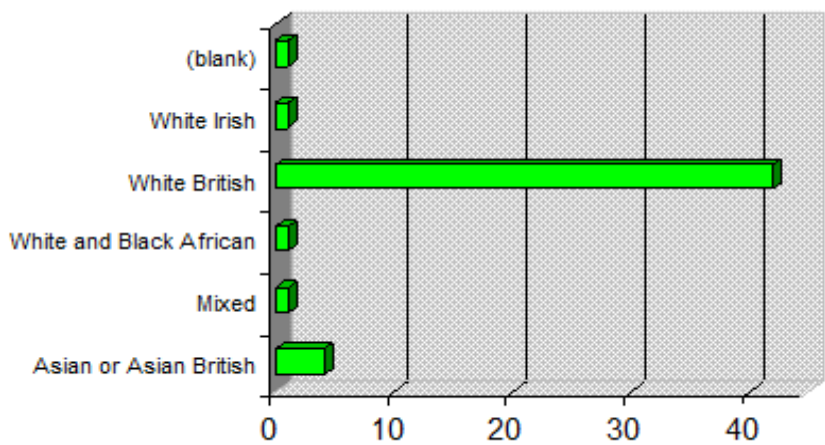
**Fig 2**



84% of the sample (88% in cohort) were White British; 4 young people were Asian or British Asian; two were mixed race; one was White Irish.

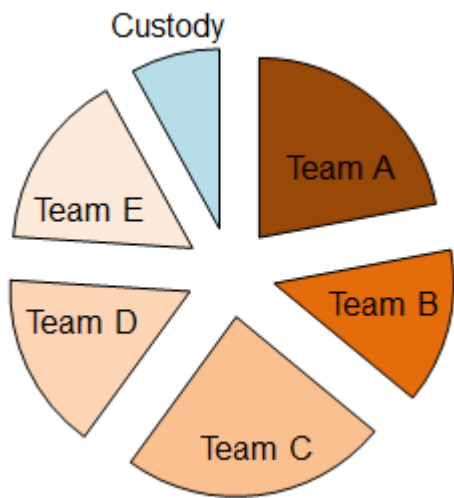
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**Fig 3**



As shown in figure 4, the sample was recruited from five teams as well as from a custodial setting. The distribution across teams reflected the distribution of team cohort sizes, within a 3% variation above or below.

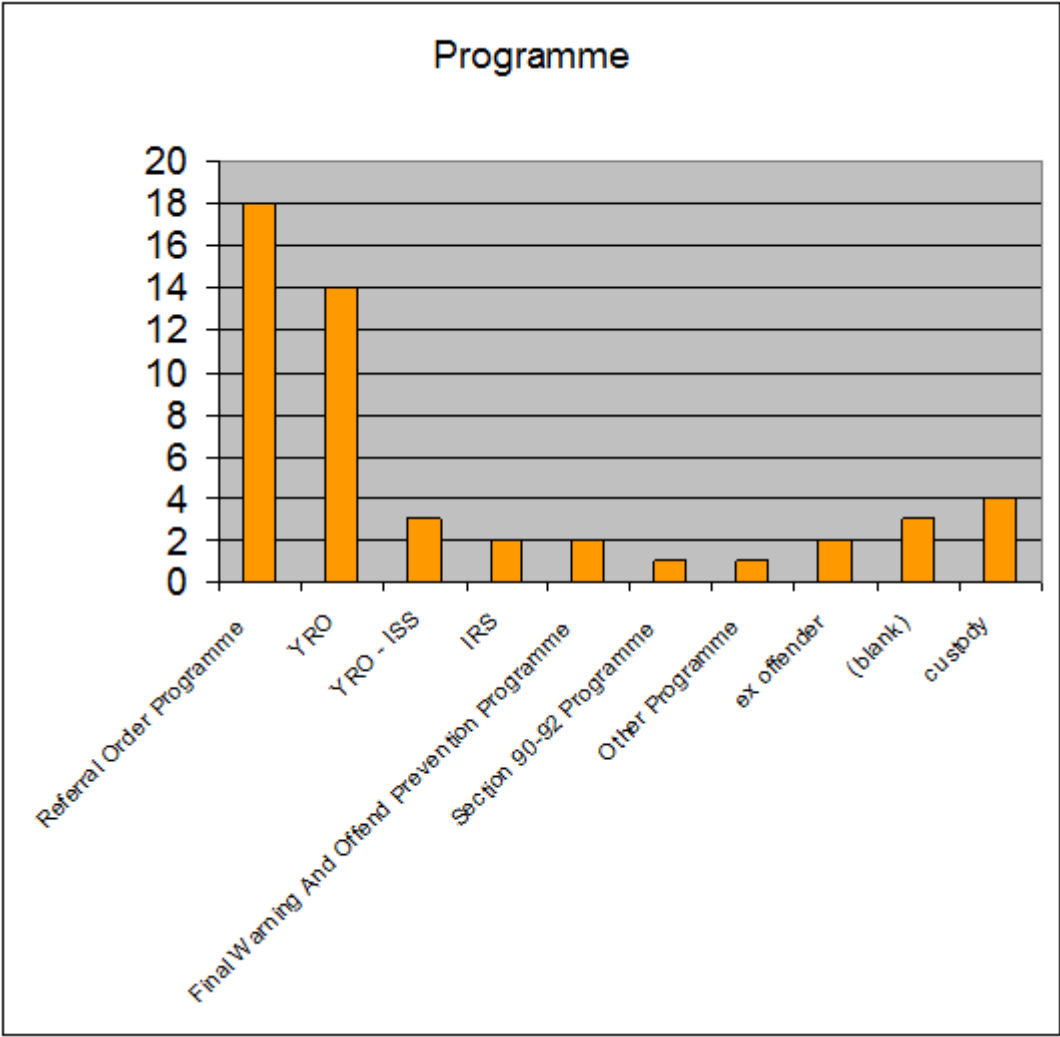
**Fig 4**



As shown in figure5, 72% of the sample (75% of the cohort) were on referral order, YRO or YRO ISS programmes. 4 were in custody (on different orders); 2 were on IRS and 2 on final warnings;

there was 1 participant on a Section 90-92, 2 no longer on a programme and 3 on unknown programmes.

**Fig 5**



Programme length for the 40 young people where we had these detail ranged from 2-15 months. 61% followed programmes that ranged from 9-12 months.

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### 3. Findings

The findings are divided into nine subsections. In each subsection, we indicate the proportion of young people who tended to see these sorts of interventions as important. We then explore how these interventions were seen to help reduce offending and how they could be rolled out further across the authority. Suggestions for change in relation to each section are given as consistent practice points and recommendations.

The different sections are as follows:

<b>3.1 Respectful, empathic relationships between young people and YOT workers .....</b>	<b>11</b>
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### 3.1 Respectful, empathic relationships between young people and YOT workers

Almost all of the young people we interviewed indicated it was vital for YOT workers to establish respectful relationships with them, to support their engagements and to encourage changes in their offending behaviour. Being listened to and respected was important for the young people in custody and in 89% (25/28) of the interviews. Young people getting on with their YOT workers was thought of as a good way to reduce re-offending in 79% (33/42) of the interviews.

These two young men explained why a good worker young person relationship is important:

*'if you don't get on with your YOT worker it's not going to work out... if I didn't get along with(worker) I wouldn't turn up for my meetings I'd probably still be getting in trouble but because I get along with her she's, it's helping me out a lot more, I can talk to her basically.'*

*(Male, aged 16 years)*

*'If you get put with some, excuse my language, dickhead, then obviously you're not going to, you're not going to want to chill out for them are you? You're just going to act up, but obviously if you get someone that's sound and you're sound with them then you'll just chill out when you come to your [YOT session].'*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

The YOT workers who were seen to be successful in establishing these respectful and effective working relationships did so by 'not putting that much pressure on', 'having a laugh', being like 'a friend' and 'listening'. For some young people this experience of being respected was in marked contrast with their experiences in other settings:

*'normally you'll get people looking at you, like say how you're dressed or something and just judge you on what they say, just like on the news or just think we're going to rob them or something, like I walk past some women, some oldish women and that, they'd been holding the bag as if I'm going to, as if I'm going to rob them or something, so when I come here it's, it's good to feel that I can speak to them and they know where I'm coming from.'*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

Some young people saw positive relationships with workers as unimportant when they saw attendance at YOT as compulsory or not useful. Sometimes young people described clashes with workers, where they got on with one worker, but they knew that other young people did not. Or, they got on with one worker but not another. One young person complained that workers just were 'speaking all the time' and not doing things.

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One young person described a difference in approach between teams, where workers were described as not putting effort into building relationships:

*‘Like in (place 1) like when I was upset and stuff, because I used to self-harm, like in (place 2) they was just like, they might as well just said oh right and just grow up, do you know what I mean? But here they like take time and like understand everything that I’m saying and then they understand like everything.’*

*(Female, aged 17-18 years)*

Relationships between workers and young people could take time to be established, sometimes because of lack of trust.

*‘at first I thought like I didn’t want to get involved with them but then they, they’ve helped me out like slow and slowly.’*

*(Female, aged 17-18 years)*

Young people’s relationships with YOT could improve over time. Two young people described changes in this way:

*‘you’ve got to be alright with them otherwise, I don’t know, they wouldn’t be alright with you I guess. ...I could have been a bit more patient with them, I wasn’t patient with them, I used to always rush around and what is it? I always wanted to be in for five minutes and go out again, you know what I mean? I didn’t want to be in, you don’t want to be in there long, you know what I mean? I just want to be in and out and then job’s a good one, you know what I mean?’*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

*‘I used to only stay for five minutes or so, because I used to say right, I’m going and, in YOT I don’t even mind it now!’*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

Getting on well with YOT workers enabled several young people to reduce their offending as it encouraged them to open up and have difficult conversations and be honest:

*‘I’ve got one of the best YOT workers out them all, she looks out for me, every time I come if she’s heard something she’ll question me about it, say have you done this, I can speak to, I tell the truth about everything because I see her just, she’s not, because I see her like a second mum, it’s that weird but that’s how I see her, it’s, and she gets on really well with my mum as well, sometimes she’ll come out to my house, and I just don’t mind her being there, like, just really respected.’*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*



Having trusting and open relationships with YOT workers could also enable young people to think about how they could change their behaviour:

*'Since I've come here I think that not just, not just the criminal side has changed but my life's changed coming here as well...I don't have to look over my shoulder no more, I don't have to worry about when Police are going to come for me, I can just carry on and jog on with my life....'*

**INT     How is that, how have they helped you?**

*Putting, just putting me on the right track really instead of like, say ....I'd come in, I'd, I'd express my feelings, I'd write them down on a piece of paper, I'd do a plan of what I'd done and what crime I'd committed, why I'd committed the crime, what prevented, what, what led me to doing the crime and what could have resourced me to, from doing the crime, so.'*

*(Female, aged 17-18 years)*

The most popular way workers could build positive relationships was through taking part in leisure activities with young people.

*say I had a boxing match or summat, it'd probably be nice for like say my YOT worker to turn up, like, do you know what I mean? Just for a bit more moral support, to say we are listening and that and we're going to help you with whatever we can and we want to come and support you but the only problem with that is there's, there's like probably so many kids to one worker so they can't be everywhere at once can they but? It'd be nice for a bit of support.*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

Doing hobbies with workers was seen to have potential for reducing offending in 66% (19/29) of the interviews. In most cases (6/10) where young people did not think this was a good idea, it was because they did not have any hobbies which workers could do with them. Workers doing hobbies with you was more important for young women as four out of the five who talked about this favoured the idea.

*'It's good to do hobbies with the people that [workers] are supposed to help and you talk to them about the stuff you have done, like, like bad stuff. Yeah, and I suppose it makes [young people] talk and especially if you know the YOT worker more'*

*(Female, aged 14-15 years)*

There were two examples of workers using taking part in activities with young people as an incentive for compliance:

*'because like I'm on licence, she [worker] said like ... because I've had to come three days a week, they say I must stick to it, like they said that at first when I first started they said you*

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*stick to it each week, they said every Thursday I'll take you gym and like fun ... and YOT worker come to gym me and that.'*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

Encouraging engagement in leisure activities (with or without YOT workers) should be seen as a vital element of establishing relationships and encouraging engagement in structured and routine activities, as discussed in more depth in section 3.3.

Trust could be enhanced through establishing boundaries of confidentiality. One example of a worker using a writing technique to develop clear understandings of what would and would not be shared is given by this young person:

*'she [worker] talks me through my problems what I've got and like to go, it's really important to trust your YOT worker and obviously they do tell you that if you say anything that you may be at risk, they're going to have to pass it on... and there's like this book, it's all about yourself ...and she [worker] goes "whatever you write in that book it's just going to be between us two and then she's got me that book so that like if I've got any problems or anything like we can go through it or anything, so she knows more about me and it's only going to be about us two, so it's like one to one, so really nice.*

**INT** *And sometimes I suppose you, if you don't want to say something to her you can write it down?*

**F** *Yeah.... And she goes no-one can look through that book just me and her and she goes at the end of the Referral Order I can take it home, yeah.'*

*(Female, aged 17-18 years)*

It was also evident that some young people felt most comfortable building good working relationships with YOT workers that recognised and respected, or indeed, represented in person, their own diversity. This manifested itself through some young women being comfortable and trusting in the presence of women YOT workers and, young men or women of Asian and/ or Black and Minority Ethnic heritage valuing a connection or relationship with a YOT worker of similar ethnicity.

**Consistent Practice Issues:** Ensure a consistent approach across the authority to valuing time spent on building trusting, respectful and empathetic working relationships between workers and young people. Recognise that this may require resources to be invested in activities, directed by young people, through which young people and workers can get to know and have confidence in each other.

**Recommendation:** Consider the need to build into YOT teams work with young people the opportunity to engage with a worker of a similar ethnicity or the same gender. This should be a flexible provision that acknowledges the diversity in young people and the importance that ethnicity and gender has on their identity and their place in the world.

### 3.2 Family and friends

One of the striking findings of this research is the importance attributed to YOT worker getting on with parents. This was thought of a good way of reducing re-offending for the young people in custody and in 81% (21/26) interviews.

YOT workers getting on well with parents was seen to help establish a relationship with the wider family, including other siblings who may potentially offend and to help relieve the pressure some parents experienced, as this young person describes:

*'they were on about like, my brother, do you know like, ..., my mum will be, you know, I'll get worried and going to get in trouble again so she like got in touch with my mum, and he carries on again [getting YOT support]. So gets worries off her shoulder doesn't it?*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

Where parents got on well with YOT, this could increase young people's trust in the service:

*'if your YOT worker gets on well with your parents ...then you, you form a bond, it's like that trust circle in't? It opens up a bit more because you think well yeah, my parents trust them maybe I can trust them that little bit more and if, if they get on well and they're chatting and that then it's like it's a good thing because then it makes you feel better about yourself. It's like, yeah, yeah, they can talk to them so, so can I like.'*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

Good relationships with families also helped information flow, increasing parents' understanding of the YOT service and legal systems. Young people also described the importance of regular communication between YOT workers and their parents, which could be by telephone, to ensure their parents were kept up to date with any changes in, for example, what sentences might be applied. YOT workers staying in touch with parents could also help them keep up to date with what was happening in families' lives:

*'Yeah, she does ask my mum if like she's got any problems or whatever, whatever's going on, which nothing does be going on, so she just, you know, just extra keep an eye out, it's nice.'*

*(Female, aged 17-18 years)*

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Good relationships between YOT and parents helped engagement as parents may encourage young people to comply:

*'Like if, like if a young person weren't turning up or owt like, talk to parents couldn't you if you got on with them well? Like make sure they come and that.'*

**INT     Yeah, that's good and does your YOT worker do that?**

*That's what I mean, my dad gets on with them, they ring my dad tell me my appointments and that, make sure he tells me.'*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

Positive interventions with families could also help reduce offending by addressing family problems that might underlie young people's offending behaviour, including problems related to domestic violence and alcohol use:

*'He'd give us a right pasting...Never hit face and all that but ... ribs and that ...that's what happens in'it? That's what goes down, you know what I mean? ...He come running out, smashing all things up and that, we was like no, about twelve or summat, eleven or summat.'*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

*'[She sorts out} family problems and shit. ...If it weren't for [worker] I wouldn't be here now. ...Because she speaks to my mum, speaks to her about things that she needs to.'*

**INT     Does your mum change after she's seen (worker)?**

*Sometimes. '*

*(Male, aged 13-14 years)*

At times, YOT workers could provide parents with support in managing their emotions, so that tensions between young people and parents did not flare up to such extremes:

*'like she [my mother] can go and get stressed she'll ring her up and, if, ... it's kind of my mum going to YOT too... When we have a fallout she rings up [worker] or she'll ring up someone else and, well mainly, it's mainly [worker]that she says everything about.'*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

One young person suggested it helps parents remain hopeful about young people changing their behaviour:

*'I think it's very good because when my mum first heard about it, she didn't want anything to do with it, like "Police, oh my God". But when she's met (worker) she's been like, yeah, she'll get you through it.'*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

Successful promotion of positive relationships between parents and young people appeared to be crucial in reducing reoffending, as when young people talked about the critical moments when they made decisions to stop offending improvements in their relationships with their families were key drivers for this change.

*'I've never really got along with my dad but when I was sixteen I just thought fuck it, move out ... [now,] I just speak to him more and if I try with him he tries with me, so. ... We just, we sat there and we had a chat and I was saying it's not worth it just arguing all the time, because it's not doing me no good because I were getting pissed off and going out all the time... YOT helped ..., because they were saying about, it's important to have a relationship with your dad'*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

Getting on with his dad helped this young man concentrate on sports and reduce his substance misuse.

Unfortunately, a few young people mentioned that workers were not engaging with parents as much as they would like them too, for example this young person said:

*'To be honest with you I don't think mine have ever spoke to my mum. '*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

Only four of the 50 young people we talked to thought that YOT workers should not have relationships with their parents. This was when they did not get on with their parents:

*'I hardly speak to my parents anyway, so depends doesn't it? But it does help, yeah. '*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

or saw themselves as independent:

*'they know I'm reliable and that, they don't really need to speak to your parents. It's like a, it's like a school thing,...'*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

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Also, two young people suggested that their parents would not engage with YOT because either, they ‘had given up on the whole process’ because the young person had been offending for so long. Or, because their parents would feel like they were having to ‘do YOT’, whereas it is the young person who is meant to do it.

YOT workers could establish good relationships with parents by coming to the young people’s house, being friendly, relaxed and informal. This was highlighted in this interview:

*‘She comes inside my house and it's like just a mate's came in and, do you know?...You have a laugh. Talking with the family...And she just sits around and talks and it's really nice. ... You can't even tell like she's a YOT worker.’*

*(Female, aged 13-14 years)*

The venue in which workers met with parents was also important. YOT workers coming to the house was mentioned by several young people and one young person said it worked well when his worker met with his mother in a café.

One young person cautioned, however, that it was important for the YOT worker’s first focus was on the young person and that their attention then moved on to parents

*‘[Workers should get on]...with me basically. And they move on to them, yeah, from me to them, yeah.’*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

To demonstrate this focus on the young person at the centre, one young person said it was important for him to be present while conversations with his family were taking place, for example being in the same room playing on an Xbox. This was important so that he knew what was being discussed.

One young person suggested a more structured mediation style of family discussion where workers spend time with the young person away from their parents, and talk to parents away from their child, before trying to help communication between all members of the family in a collective discussion. Another young person described support with doing activities as a whole family, which had helped improve family dynamics.

This kind of relationship based working with families was much more popular than help with parenting skills or friendship circles, which were only discussed in 15 interviews and only supported in 9 of those. Those who didn’t think YOT could provide a useful role tended to say this was because their offending behaviour was not related to their family or friends. Some young people interviewed did identify that their friendship circles or where they lived were the root cause of some of their offending behaviour, one felt there was little YOT workers could do

about this. Two young people said YOT should have nothing to do with personal matters like family and friends.

*'Even though like you're coming to YOT for a reason and they're trying to help you sort your life out and that, maybe sometimes your personal life should just stay as your personal life,'*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

Similarly, YOT was seen to have little role in supporting young people to develop intimate partnerships of their own (by getting girlfriends or boyfriends).

In the few cases where help with friendships or personal relationships was seen as important, young people described YOT workers helping them engage in activities through which they would develop friendships with others. Two young people suggested YOT could have offered them the chance to move to a different area (away from current family and friends) when they came out of custody. Also one young person described help with coming to terms with not having a good relationship with his family.

However, one young person said parenting support that his mother had received from social services had made a big difference to his offending behaviour.

*'I used to come home and, well from school, my mum'd be pissed and stuff and it just weren't healthy, weren't good. ...[now things have changed] My last offence was in like two thousand and ten.'*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

**Consistent Practice Issues:** Ensure workers have the time and skills to develop relationships with parents wherever this is appropriate, and guided by the views of the young person. Ensure effective information exchange with families wherever possible and provide support in addressing parenting stress and family problems.

### 3.3 Structure, Routine and Hobbies

#### **Structure and Routine**

Help with achieving structure and routine was thought as a good way of reducing re-offending in 21/27 (78%) of the interviews where young people considered this issue. It was important because many young people believed that attending YOTs provided an opportunity to work to a more organised day where there were targets and goals set for them. One young person explains,

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*‘Yeah because you have got routine coming here haven’t you? If you are having regular appointments planned every week then you have got a routine haven’t you?. Like you have got your college or whatever you are doing in between YOT, and then you have got your YOT, and your weekend and that, so.’*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

It was important because it enabled the young people to experience a different and more productive way of spending their days. Young people talked of learning to spend time away from company that may have led them into further trouble. Whereas having structure built in provided a level of security, as the young people felt they knew where they had to be at any time in the day, and therefore felt less vulnerable to getting involved in offending behaviour. They felt that structure and routine could be achieved by YOT workers helping them with time management, getting them involved in education, training and employment (which will be discussed below), discussing with them how they could spend their spare time on hobbies or other interests. This may involve YOT workers investing some time to encourage the young people to pursue hobbies that were rewarding and encourage a purpose, other than offending, for the young person. This young person explains how YOT workers helped him evaluate how he was spending his time in other peoples’ company that would make him vulnerable to offending and how structure could change how he spent his day,

*‘they are nice people and that, and they just, I don’t know they’re just. I had targets are set out for me and I had to achieve that was with (worker) and that, for like cutting down on the weed and then with (worker) I had targets to keep myself busy and stuff, like just playing football, just not hanging around with them kind of people. . .’*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

As with most intervention from YOT workers, building structure and routine addressed the multi-faceted challenges that young people experienced, to change their behaviours from offending. In this case, this meant addressing the young person’s reliance on a specific drug, cannabis.

However, for a few, structure and routine was viewed in a less constructive and more ambivalent way to avoid offending and to work with YOT workers. This was mainly because structure evoked memories of spending time in a young offenders’ institute. As one young person explains, structure and routine has a specific meaning in his experience,

*‘Its like your know everyone in there, you know you are safe, well you know that you are not safe, but if you have a fight or something, it’s gone in two seconds like, you know you are not going to get into trouble, with it and stuff like that, just like that really, well like its alright being locked up init?’*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*



For this young person, structure and routine, meant a rigid, harsh, regime of prison. Others were more dismissive of it and felt it was a bad idea. As these young people point out, it is not much help in changing their offending behaviour,

*'structure and routine . . . not really . . . because you have got to turn up haven't you?'*  
(Male, aged 15-16 years)

And,

*'I don't need help with that,'* (Male, aged 17-18 years)

However, these views were in the minority and for most who addressed this question, it seemed to be particularly important to provide a focus and purpose to their daily lives. There was an acknowledgement from the young people, that YOT workers could help establish a positive pattern of behaviour on a daily basis and that this in turn would enable them to have a much better chance of not having the time, or the inclination, to get involved in behaviours that may lead to offending. It was felt by the young people that because of the nature of YOT work, fixed appointments, activities, offence focused programmes, had enabled them to concentrate on the positive opportunities in their lives.

### ***Help with their hobbies***

Most of the young people 15/25 (60%) that addressed this issue from the cards presented to them felt that YOT workers helping their hobbies was a positive intervention in their lives in helping them avoid re-offending. This was a particularly important issue for young people in custody.

Young people thought help with hobbies was important because the YOT worker was taking time to discover and encourage the young person to participate in what they felt was an important activity in their lives.

*'Yeah, I'm, I'm glad that when they suggested it to be honest, because I wouldn't have found it, you know, I stopped playing football what, three years ago, erm, so I wouldn't have started again, you know, if it wasn't for (worker) to help me,'*

(Male, aged 15-16 years)

It was also important because YOT workers encouraging young people to engage in hobbies enabled them to feel good about themselves and to build up their self-esteem,

*'like eye contact and stuff like, you know, my nerves get the better of me, especially in a group, I won't, I just won't talk to any new people, you know, erm, but when I'm playing pool, you know, I just feel I can talk to that one person I'm playing with or can talk to the group because I'm just concentrating on something else, you know, so I don't know, I just feel at home when I'm doing that anyway, you know, it's something I should have started doing a long time ago, you know, and it might have actually kept me calm, you know, so'*

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*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

YOT workers could achieve this by investing time in building relationships with the young people that they worked with to discover their particular interests. For some YOT workers this involved participating in the hobby with the young person. For others, it was being encouraged to release some energy and get involved in some type of sport. Indeed, physical activity, mainly sport, was the most popular hobby that young people felt provided them with positive rewards, those being; a sense of self-worth, avoiding re-offending, and feeling good about themselves. As this young person explains,

*‘Help with hobbies, that's important because like when I first started coming to YOT they asked me about different courses what I wanted to do and stuff like that and because I've played rugby in the past, I tried getting back into it, that didn't work, so they suggested well why don't you try boxing? ...this were like three, four month ago, ever since I've stuck at the boxing I've been training at it and it's given me summat to do, it's given me a new hobby and it's give me like a, I don't know, a new sport to concentrate on and that, it's really good. Like they, they tried getting me on to, another boxing course that I've, after I'd done the first one, so it's, it's opened the doors a bit more into like giving myself summat to do, getting a lot of anger out and stuff like that, so it's, it's give me a new release like, sort of summat to keep myself out of trouble and, and a reason to, to do summat with my life because you wake up, say you do some training and then you feel right happy, it releases an happy hormone and you just feel good for rest of day then and it's, it's really good.’*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

For some young people it was not always useful because they felt that their own hobbies, and attending YOTs to address their offending behaviour, were two separate parts of their lives. Hobbies in this sense, were seen by a minority of young people as a personal social experience, and they felt YOTs should focus on how they addressed their offending behaviour that had got them into trouble. As one young person put it,

*‘Help with your hobbies. Well no, mine's football really, just hobbies nowt to do with YOT really, I'd say’*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

For others who had attended YOTs, they felt that the opportunity to have support in participating in their hobbies was not really offered by their particular YOT worker. This young person explains,

*‘ They've never helped me with my hobbies, other people might be different, you know what I mean? But. ’*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

In sum, help with their hobbies for young people attending YOTs seemed to be particularly important as it provided them with a strong motivation to attend, and to build the activity into their spare time to avoid getting into trouble and re-offending. It also provided the YOT worker the opportunity to build a relationship with the young person and to experience what the young person enjoyed doing as an activity in their spare time. Importantly, helping them with constructive leisure activities could involve YOT workers participating in, and beginning to understand what, the young person felt they enjoyed doing.

**Consistent Practice Issue:** Ensure all YOT workers focus on structure and routine in a young person's life, as a systematic element of their interventions and court orders. Recognise that developing structure may require time and resources for interventions aimed at encouraging young people's engagement in positive activities

**Recommendation:** Consider developing a plan with key recreational facilities in the region – sports centres, gyms, cycle tracks etc - to ensure that all young people have the chance to access and participate in constructive leisure activities whilst attending the YOT.

### 3.4 Practical Help

#### ***Help with where you live or getting somewhere to live***

Help from YOTs in getting somewhere to live was thought as a good way of reducing re-offending for 20/28 (71%) of young people who had considered this issue. For most of these young people they had identified a time where there has been a crisis in their lives. It may have been linked to their offending, and as a consequence of this behaviour, their parents had been angry and rejected them. It was important that YOT workers had contacts with housing agencies for young people to provide support at this critical time in their lives. As this young person explains,

*'And there's a couple of girls there that live on their own and they're sixteen, seventeen and YOT workers have helped them because you know where I go (service) to meet my Probation Officers, these people that have got no parents or whatever, been kicked out, they live there at [housing project who] have provided them with flats, so yeah.'*

*(Female, aged 17-18 years)*

This young person's explanation of YOT workers helping two young women to find accommodation in a time of crisis is support that is often provided by YOT workers in the local authority. For other young people the help has been needed because their home and/or family life may involve experiencing domestic violence. These individuals felt their YOT workers'

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support and guidance with alternative housing was critical to avoid being vulnerable to re-offending,

*‘yeah, yeah, but could, but they could like, like because some, I don't know who all the Housing Associations are and I've got (service 1) with my mate being on it, so you're just like, you need to know what's round the area. because you don't know, you don't know about (service 1) and stuff like that and most people go through domestic violence but they don't know about (service 2), so.’*

*(Female, aged 17-18 years)*

However, for some young people, they felt it was not always useful because they were independent and resourceful enough not to need support with finding somewhere to live. This tended to be young people who were a little older and more independent from their families.

*‘I'm not sure, oh yeah, they said to me that I could do like [housing agency] or I said to anyone I don't want any help, I'll go ... ‘*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

However, for most, help with getting somewhere to live was particularly important because it provided a level of stability for a young person at a time in their lives when they needed that support. This enabled them to focus on the elements of their lives, for instance attending their YOT that may help them with not re-offending. This involved YOT workers in the local authority having a good knowledge and network of available housing in the area for young people who have offended. It is evident that many young people valued this support and intervention at a critical time in their lives.

### **Help with benefits or money**

Help with benefits or money was thought of a good way to reduce re-offending 16/25 (64%) young people that considered this issue. The main reason that young people thought this was a good idea was because a lack of monies was often cited as a primary reason for some of them (re) offending. As this young person explains,

*‘Yeah, they should ... like say because some people don't even know what they're entitled to. I don't know what I'm fully entitled to at the moment so you should know like what you're entitled to and how it's all going to work and stuff like that. What jobs are, they're a piece of shit anyway.’*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

Welfare rights knowledge for YOT workers would provide another positive reason for young people to attend YOTS and commit to avoid re-offending. An opportunity to learn how to claim benefits was a key skill young people felt YOTs could provide. As this young person explains,

*'yeah, yeah, it'd be better because it'd be, not, like, I'm not saying they're not helpful but they'd, they'd be more informative about stuff like that because not a lot of people know, know about stuff like that nowadays do they? Some people have been brought up working and they don't have the foggiest about anything like that and it'd just, just be helpful like. Like because I mean the, at the Job Centre they, they will try and fob you off a little bit if you don't know what you're doing and you don't, you don't know what you're doing then you'll just get basic everything, but like now I'm eighteen I know that I can get a higher band of rent which is what my landlady's demanding because I'm living there on my own, so if I didn't know that then I'd be stuck, do you know what I mean'*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

This could be achieved by YOT workers being able to navigate the complex relationship between benefits, housing and employment for many of the young people that attend YOTS. This is because some young people explained it was really helpful and supportive at this critical time in their lives. Particularly, as stated above by one of the young people, many had not been taught anything about benefits that they were entitled to, or even being able to budget the money they received.

However, a minority felt that they had the requisite skills necessary to negotiate the benefits system. As this young person explained,

*'Help with benefits or money. They don't really, they can't help you with stuff like that, YOT . . . No, they can't help you with benefits and money and that.'*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

Though help with benefits or money was important, it was not viewed as the top priority that young people needed from YOTs. Some young people had raised a political point, that if wealth were redistributed in society there may be less offending behaviour. They suggested that if rich people gave money to poor people, those who had less resources would feel less angry about life and not so inclined to offend. However, other young people thought this idea was ill informed, as they felt rich people worked hard to gain their wealth.

In sum, young people valued specific advice on finances, income support and housing. It provided an opportunity for YOT workers to build a relationship of trust and reciprocity whilst addressing their offending behaviour.

<p><b>Consistent Practice Issue</b> Ensure all YOT workers teach young people about managing their finances when attending the YOT. This would include welfare and housing benefit advice, but must address the wider issues of managing on a limited budget. Recognise workers may need time to develop the skills and local knowledge needed to provide this advice, and that connections with other specialist services attending YOT buildings may also be useful.</p>
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### 3.5 Health and Emotional Wellbeing

#### **Drugs and Alcohol**

Receiving help through YOT for drugs and alcohol was thought as a good way to reduce re-offending in 71% (30/31) interviews. Where it was not an important issue for young people, this was because they felt they had no problematic substance misuse, or did not want to address this.

Those who had had issues around drug and alcohol misuse made strong link between this and the moments when they committed offences, as described by this young person:

*‘I used to smoke a lot of cannabis me, and drink, and that's how I ended up offending. ... I reckon it should be like I don't know, a key thing to be worked on with young people because it's, like I say once you get into stuff like that, it's hard to get out of... you've ruined your life already and you're only young like they could be teenagers.’*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

Young people had received help, through a variety of interventions. These included talking through the issues in a structured way, such as Cycle of Life and going to a specialist clinics or services:

*‘Like, it's like a drug and alcohol thing that,..., if you go to them you can like get massages and that, and that, you get a worker and like they'll tell you like, what like, if it's drug you're taking, tell you like what it does to you and all that, like try and stop you’*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

Getting engaged in alternative activities also helped young people change their drug and alcohol use:

*‘since they've got me into boxing and stuff ... I won't go out drinking like I used to because I'm not bored, ..., but it might not help with everyone’*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

There were mixed reports about drug and alcohol interventions, with some young people describing significant success in reducing or ending this substance misuse. Other young people indicated that drugs counselling on its own was not enough:

*‘I reckon if you really wanted to stop weeding, you went to see a drug worker it actually would help you but...we don't want to stop weed. What's the point in stopping smoking weed and then we'd just be bored here because we haven't got a job and we can't find a job so it's shit and then, so we go out and do summat to get money because there's no*

*money and then we end up getting in trouble for it, and then it just keeps going on and on like that.'*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

Motivation to stop, whether with or without drug counselling support, was a repeated theme often focused on personal decisions to stop and being supported on the path to work:

*'like the YOT, they wouldn't tell you, they wouldn't say to you right, you've got to quit drugs or you've got to quit alcohol, they'll, they'll put you in the right step, they'll put you in the right path. ... they've put things into my mind where I've sat back at home and I've thought actually I... want to do something with my life.*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

Support and praise from YOT workers outside of targeted services continued to be important:

*'it's got to be a sort of a support thing, you've got to have the support around you, if you don't have that then it's, it's harder ... YOT do do a lot of, support as well... even just congratulating you, know what I mean, when I, when I come in, I haven't smoke weed for a week. "Fantastic, that!" Just that little like congratulation, it's, it's just like a good feeling in yourself, it just makes you feel better about yourself and then you want to keep doing well because people are congratulating you.'*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

There seemed to be difference in approaches from different YOT workers, with one request for workers to help more by pushing harder

*'I don't know [worker] didn't really like, didn't push me as much as I need to be pushed, so...I'm quite an angry person but if they'd have pushed me to like, know to like, just give me the sheet figures, every time you take a drug write it down, what you take, do you know what I mean?'*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

Whereas from a second young person, there was a request to be allowed 'a bit more head space' to decide for yourself when the time was right. It is clearly a hard balance to achieve.

### **Counselling**

In contrast to drugs and alcohol, counselling was only seen as a way to reduce re-offending in just over half (11/20) interviews. Despite the relatively low level of interest in this issue, compared with other suggested interventions, this service may however have a greater role

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than the figures suggest as counselling can be a relatively stigmatised or intimate issue to discuss. Counselling was equally important for young men as for young women.

Counselling was seen as beneficial for different reasons by different young people. It could help by ‘getting it out in the open. ...[instead of] keeping it all bottled up and ...boiling.’ It could help young people manage their stress levels, deal with past (and current) trauma and control their violence towards themselves and others, but sometimes they did not receive enough of it. Two young people described a CAMHS service being withdrawn before they were ready. One young person spoke about needing emotional and physical support following a traumatic incident associated with a crime but never having received any counselling or health care. However another young person spoke about YOT being the first place he came to when emotional problems arose.

Although six young people thought counselling might be useful sometimes, only two young people who talked about counselling thought it would not work. In one instance this was because about personality, the young person did not feel confident meeting new people. In the second instance this is because the service offered did not match the young person’s needs:

*‘I’ve tried [anger management stuff].. school did it with me but that just didn’t work at all....They just tried talking to me and trying to get me into boxing, just, that’s just giving me more strength to use against someone else, so it kind of defeats the object of getting it all out of me’*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

The perceived benefits of counselling varied according to particular personal experiences rather than offending or custodial histories, gender or age. There were however repeated messages about what makes for an effective counselling service.

In some cases, an emotionally aware or ‘counselling’ type approach might be provided by YOT workers ‘my YOT worker does it for me’, or, by a nurse placed in YOT team. Some approaches build on the relationship building described in section 3.1, which enabled young people to reflect on their feelings about committing crimes and how to move on from these. Emotional support from YOT workers had also enabled one young person to move on from self-harming:

*‘Now I believe that people believe in me, so. I do have down days and I do like cry and get angry and stuff but I don’t self-harm.’*

*(Female, aged 17-18 years)*

There was also a clear call for specialist counselling services, with staff who have specialist knowledge and higher thresholds of confidentiality:

*‘I don’t know like, sometimes like you can say to a YOT worker, yeah, yeah, yeah, I’m fine but really you’re not, like you want, in a way you kind of want someone to recognise it, the*



*health services would recognise it ...I don't know whether going to [counselling] with it like and confidential kind of thing, you could say they would keep it confidential, could, could ?... if you've got trust issues not going to tell them anything are you?'*

*(Female, aged 17-18 years)*

Specialist services needed to be at appropriate times and there were different suggestions about what appropriate venues might be. One young person thought a teenage drop in clinic would be good:

*'That'd be good because that's like, that's like their choice to go there to talk about everything, [but it should be for teenagers] like when they finally realise that they need help with stuff like that.'*

*(Female, aged 17-18 years)*

Another young person favoured home visits:

*'Yeah, like a few week, well nobody's seen it, do you know what I mean? I were hiding it and that, but luckily I just didn't do something stupid to myself and that, were going through that, but. ... [they should] come to your house or something like that. I know what I mean, it's a big thing coming here and that in it? Talk about stuff like that. Like when I come here and I've got to walk up like from [more than 2 miles away]'*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

A third young person preferred the idea of a drop in at a doctor's surgery or clinic. And again here distance was an issue.

*'even if it were in (place)I probably be alright to get to, it's only fifteen, twenty minutes on a bus, but then you feel safer because you're in the, in your own environment where you live and that, so you feel a bit more safer'*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

When young people engaged with a service, consistency of worker was important:

*'I've seen thousand of different people for it, ... but the people I met and I did like and get along with most of them, like older men, because you, I don't know, I just found it easier to talk to and got to know and they just started to kind of move out because they was only part-time people and stuff, and I got just left with (worker)] but it worked, like I did everything right when I was with that person, I had a goal to go with but as soon as he went, just went back to my old ways and then I met another lad [who got me into trouble].'*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

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The way in which the service is introduced is also important:

*‘the easiest way to get a young person to accept the help or to try and understand what the help is first is quite literally explain what it's for, you know,...’ ‘Would you like to see a counsellor? They are to help you with any home problems you have, any problems you have in school blah blahblah.’ You know, explain a little bit more in detail what it's about and they feel more comfortable about it’*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

**Consistent Practice Issue:** Ensure YOT workers have awareness of the varied ways emotional distress can manifest; that there are appropriate and varied services to refer to, that these are properly explained to young people; and that workers consistently provide emotional support in the form of encouragement for success.

**Recommendation for Health Services:** Counselling and substance misuse services need to be available in young person friendly or non-stigmatising venues close to where they live. Consider developing drop in or self-referral routes, or greater awareness of these if already existing services are available, so that young people can contact services at times of crisis.

### 3.6 Education, Training and Work

#### **Education and Training**

The young people felt that help with education and training was a good way of reducing re-offending in 20/29 (69%) of the interviews where they had considered this issue. They suggested that it was important for a number of reasons, one of these being that they viewed and experienced visiting the YOT as a an opportunity to keep out of any further trouble by getting involved in some form of training. One young person explained,

*‘My YOT got me back into college because I were committing crime and that, I wasn’t bothered going to college, so I were more bothered about doing crime and getting my money from my crime instead of going to college and getting my money from my college.’*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

This young person’s comments are indicative of others that viewed the provision of an opportunity for education and training by YOTS as a chance to invest their energies in an activity that would help them to avoid getting into further trouble It was an acknowledgement by the young person that they were going to do something with their time and energy, but that it

would be much more productive invested in an activity that could enhance their prospects of gaining employment rather than re-offending. Further, it was the support and encouragement from the YOT to go to college that was the critical factor in enabling the young people to avoid re-offending and engage in education and training.

Young people in custody identified the importance of education and training opportunities and help with getting a job as top priorities they wanted from their workers when attending a YOT.

Some young people felt that encouragement to (re)enter education and training could be achieved by focusing on their individual hopes and aspirations for future employment. This young person felt that the YOT assisted his development and training concerning sport,

*'They helped me get my coaching, coaching qualification and that. . They put me, they put me on a course in [town 1], to do NVQ level one, for football and sport, like gym and that, so done that, then they put me onto another one in [town 2] for my FA level one coaching so . . '*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

This young person believed that the YOTs were providing something that would enable them to provide better opportunities for themselves. For the majority of respondents this was also a key reason to engage in education and training. Although some experienced it as an opportunity to learn in a much more relaxed and enjoyable setting, than a formal school setting.

*I do not like to be in that school environment because I don't like it too much, its not a place I like to be out working, but yeah, its [education placement] a good place, everybody that I know that has gone there so far has enjoyed it, because it is something different. And they have never done before, especially like young lads that don't go like building works and then getting like, they'll help us like, they'll help us out and (name of young person) , he's doing, once he's finished up there they're putting his straight on to an apprenticeship, ... So they'll help people doing that as well when they finish up their school, they'll get him straight into a job as well, so they're good for that so it's not bad.'*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

This young person talks specifically of a training centre that bridged the divide between school, training and eventually opportunities for employment. The opportunity to do this in a more flexible environment was a key reason for the experience to be positive for the young people.

Whilst most young people felt that education and training was a good idea, for a few it was not always useful because they felt that the experience was frustrating and not very rewarding. The young person explained,

*'Well yeah, because I just get annoyed, you spend all this time on building a wall to knock it down again to build another, it really annoys me.'*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

Out of the 4 young people that felt more ambivalent about attending education and training it

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seemed that their inability to see that there would be an immediate reward made them feel more sceptical of the benefits of pursuing this course of action.

A minority of young people felt it was a bad idea because there was nothing tangible at the end of the training, for instance,

*‘I want a job, that’s it, say, I don’t want to go down doing daft things for two weeks and stuff and not having to do, I want a job, I don’t want to go round doing daft courses and stuff, you know what I mean? I just want to get a job, they don’t help you get a job.’*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

However, it needs to be emphasised that a reluctance to engage in education and training was the minority view amongst the young people that responded.

In sum, YOT work that enabled young people to access education and training was valued by most of the young people who discussed this issue. They understood it as a clear route away from offending behaviour and into employment. Further, those YOT workers that had the knowledge, skills and had invested the time to support young people into education and training had established good working relationships with them. It is evident in this local authority that most YOT workers provided support to access education and training and that this was experienced as being beneficial for most young people.

### **Help with getting a Job**

Help with getting a job was seen as a way of reducing re-offending by 65% (20/31) of young people that had considered this issue, but only 4 felt that it was a bad idea, the rest believed that it was dependent on their circumstances, for instance if they had job or needed a job.

One young person explained,

*‘Someone got me a job I wouldn’t be in trouble ever.’*

*(Female, aged 17-18 years)*

The young people felt that it was the opportunities that employment provided for the rest of their lives that could change the way they viewed themselves and their future opportunities in life.

*“I got my voluntary job today. I don’t . . I don’t get paid for it, but its like I can wake up every Thursday morning and think , “I can go to work”, even though I am not getting paid for it, I am still going to work. I’m still doing summat what I enjoy.’*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

Helping them find employment could be achieved by the YOT workers focusing some of there time with the young person in discussing what the young person wanted to do, what practical help was needed, for instance access to specific training courses, or support in getting to work. The young people suggested that if YOT workers could help find them employment, it was probably of as much value as talking about their offending behaviour. This is because they felt a sense of personal achievement and worth when they had the opportunity to work. Another young person put it in this way,

*'Helping you get a job. When I first came here I wanted to go in the army and I started, my YOT worker,, I wanted to go in the army and then a week after I got a phone call off somebody in the office saying I've booked you an interview and I can run you, run you there and run you back, so I thought that was quite good that she'd gone out of her way to do that, in the spare time, it was on a weekend as well, so didn't expect her to do that.'*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

Whilst most felt that YOTs supporting them in finding employment was a positive in helping them stop offending for some it was felt it may not be useful or possible because of their criminal record. Some young people expressed a fear that they would not be trusted and viewed as possible employees because they had a history of offending behaviour. One young person explains,

*'They, for that, because that's going to be a bit hard now for us because I've been, I've been, I've been to jail twice now, and he were, he came the second with me in it, so it's going to be a bit, bit hard for someone to say that, give you, it's just like what did you go to prison for? And obviously thefts and burglaries and for stupid things, and obviously they're not going to trust us and shit like that, so it's going to be a bit harder that for us.'*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

Whilst these young people would like help getting employment they are a little more pessimistic about the possibilities of achieving this because they believe prospective employers would not want to take them on. Others thought it was a bad idea, some because they viewed coming to YOTs as a punishment and should not be anything to do with their future employment prospects. As one young person put it,

*'Not really, like it's punishment really isn't it? Like it's something you get from offending in it? So they shouldn't really be like helping you out really should they?' (Male, aged 15-16 years)*

In sum, there was reticence amongst a minority of young people that viewed YOT teams as specifically concerned with their offending behaviour. However, for most, education, training and employment opportunities were seen as a really positive help for them avoiding re-offending and changing their behaviours.

<b>Consistent Practice Issue:</b> Ensure all YOT workers build a training, education and employment path as part of their work with young people on their YOT orders.
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<b>Recommendation:</b> Colleges and young person's education and training centres must provide places on their courses for young people attending YOTs on a mandatory basis. This would mean that every young person who attends a YOT would be guaranteed a place on an education and/or training course. Consider, in discussion with the relevant education services, how this might be implemented.
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### 3.7 Role models

Mentoring was seen as a useful source of support in helping to reduce re-offending in 59% (13/22) of the interviews, but only 4 young people thought it was not a good idea. The others thought it would be good in some situations and not others, or were unclear about the meaning of the word ‘mentoring’ in a YOT context.

Meetings with other young people and ex-offenders were also seen as useful in 66% (19/29) of interviews. As with mentoring, only a few (5) young people thought that it was not a good idea, for the rest it depended on how meetings were organised.

Significantly, the young people we interviewed judged both mentoring and group meetings with ex-offenders to be virtually as important as the other aspects of support with practical issues, emotional health and education/employment which form a more routine part of YOT work.

Three young people identified that YOT workers fulfilled a mentoring kind of role, by giving them insight into what life could be like instead.

*‘it’s a bit like a YOT worker, but you see them one to one, a bit like counselling but mentor’s a bit safer than counselling.’*

*(Female, aged 14 years)*

*‘Yeah, she [YOT worker] does, yeah, she, when I come in she always asks me like am I still into, up for the army or have I changed my mind? Am I still working? So she does mentor me basically, yeah...she’s just basically somebody there you can talk to, I always like tell her basically everything.’*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

However some young people did not have these sorts of relationships with workers and most young people, echoing the findings of previous research (User Voice 2011), were motivated by wanting support from ex-offenders because of their shared experience and understanding.

*‘the way I see it with people, when it comes to stuff like that like, like I’ve got in trouble, I would rather listen to somebody that I know that’s basically been in trouble, they’ve been in my shoes themselves and they know what they’re talking about than somebody that’s actually, like you get your lawyers and that lot, they’ve never offended, and they, I don’t really listen to them because I, you’ve never been in my shoes, ..., I’d rather listen to people that have been through what I’m going through because I’ll take more advice off them than somebody that’s never been through it and they’ve just seen it.’*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

Mentoring was seen to ‘just always keeps you up and like thinking straight.’ The seven young people who had had experience of meeting with ex-offenders were very enthusiastic about the effect that it had had in promoting their desistance.

*'it'd help people think, you know, if he's done it [stopped offending] I can do it, so, yeah.'*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

*'sometimes you look at them and you think oh my God, you don't want to end up, that's it'*

*(Female, aged 17-18 years)*

*'I did something with this [worker] and he took me to [agency], and ... a lad [I met] ...he'd been in jail for twenty one years and ...basically I speak to him for about three hours, ...he just basically told me about all this stuff and ..., well, I know a lot more then I did about prison now, [laughs] and it put, kind of put me off, too right! He weren't just like 'Oh it's not bad prison' or anything. He told me straight, [laughs]. 'It's not nice at all, it's not a nice place to be.' Like all this stuff about how [it is there]... and, ... I knew it were true.*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

*'[Where I go for education] the staff that they have up there are all people that have, really that have offended and they want to get back and ...the way I see it they've done worse than me when they were my age and they've done something with their life, so if they can do it easy, I should be able to do it. But, so I reckon it is a good thing for like if they did it here, like if they had a meeting like with people like that have offended that come to, basically to come and talk to us I reckon that would be a good thing.'*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

Although four young people said they would prefer a one to one approach to mentoring, because of their discomfort in groups or difficulty socialising with other young people one young person described group work as a way of being less isolated:

*' obviously, see I don't know no-one here me, I don't, I don't know no-one, I've, I always come on my own and I just speak to what, my YOT worker and go me, maybe getting a few of the lads together or even if girls come here getting us all together, maybe sitting down having a chat with us all, maybe asking us what crimes we committed, see if anyone wants to bring it out in the open or even take us all on a bit of a trip or summat... Instead of being individuals, because we're, end of day we're all the same, we're here for the same reasons, because we've committed a crime.'*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

In one YOT area, the young people interviewed had no experience of meeting with ex-offenders. In one area where other young people had had this opportunity a young person had requested this intervention and his YOT worker had not set up the experience. And in a third area one person had previously enjoyed groupwork, but it had ended when the worker who facilitated it had left. In three of the five YOT areas, therefore, there were clear requests for a greater emphasis on group work and meeting with ex-offenders.

Two young people were concerned that group work and mentoring would be forced upon them, and four felt uncomfortable with group work. It is therefore important to recognise that such

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activities should be voluntary and that YOT workers can perform a 'mentoring' type role (if they have time to take this on) with young people who are uncomfortable meeting with others.

Young people also warned it was important to ensure that young people were meeting up with positive role models:

*'meet someone who's robbed a car and been sent down for it, and be like, could wreck everything couldn't it? ...Depends what you come in for doesn't it? What level of crime you're on.'*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

However, the practical details were seen as straightforward:

*'It can just like be in like a big room with like a few people that have like been picked with like say the workers think right well this person needs push, a bit of push, like bit ... this person, this person, and you know, like sit in this room like, say an ex-offender and then they talk about like how they was and how, how they changed their life and what, what happened to them kind of thing and stuff like that. ...It doesn't even matter if [the ex-offenders] are a bit older.'*

*(Female, aged 17-18 years)*

Three young people interviewed even offered to be peer-mentors themselves:

*'but I wouldn't mind like after you'd change from being a teenager and stuff, one of them people who had been there and done that, and tell people about it, I wouldn't mind that, because I'd have a lot to say.'*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

*'there's, there's a thirteen year old lad that lives over road from my mum's, he got into a bad crowd, started smoking weed and stuff like that and I kind of took him under my wing and I just said like, you know, it's, what you're doing's wrong, you need to sort your head out, I've been there, done that, and once you get into stuff like that, it's easier to get into it then it is to get out of it. And, and he didn't realise and he, and he, you know what I mean, I took him under my wing and I got him trying to do sports, stuff like that ...I mean you can't force someone to change their life, if they want to do it they, they do it don't they? I mean a lot of its experience, self, personal experience, you don't know until you go through it but it's like, that, a role that I take on and that, like, I like helping and, helping people so it'd be like a good role for me to play, like, you know, with experience and that, be able to tell people what I've been through and how I've changed and that, and how easy is it to change once you, once you get into that routine and that, so.'*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

One potential volunteer peer mentor suggested young people could be motivated to participate through incentives:



*'like say, if you had a peer mentor group and you had people that were coming in and they had, probably had a bit of trouble or summat and you had a set group, like people that came in quite a lot, you know, to talk and stuff like that and at the end of the year they could just go out, get up, go to Alton Towers and then it's a day, it's stress free, it's out the way and, and you're looking forward to summat then you've got summat to look forward to as a group, and then you'll be bonding together, it's like team, team bonding and stuff like that and socialising, and that's what a lot of people need nowadays because there's not a lot of sociable people about it, should I say?'*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

**Consistent Practice Issues:** Ensure YOT workers in all areas have access to schemes through which young people can meet with ex-offenders; offer this opportunity to all young people.

**Recommendation for YOT:** Consider setting up a peer-mentoring scheme through which young people can meet in groups with other young people who have successfully stopped offending (following the suggestions for practical details outlined above by young people). Pilot and evaluate this scheme in one area and spread it across the five teams if successful.

### 3.8 Prison, Restorative Justice and Community Work

The young peoples' opinions regarding the work that YOTs and the criminal justice system provided for young people that focused on punishment and reparation concerning reducing re-offending evoked some of the strongest opinions and emotions in their responses.

#### ***Restorative justice***

Restorative justice was seen as a way of reducing re-offending by 15/22 (56%) of young people that considered this issue. There were mixed opinions regarding its relative value in relation to challenging them and making them think about their offending behaviour. Young women were slightly less favourable to restorative justice than young men.

Those young people that thought it had positive impact on their offending behaviour, who referred to restorative justice, meeting their victim and apologising, were mainly concerned with offences they had committed against property, not violent offences against the person. These young people articulated feelings of guilt and remorse when they heard from their victim how their offending behaviour had such a detrimental impact on their victim's lives. For some it was also a cathartic experience, because hearing the victim's suffering as a consequence of the offending and apologising to them enabled the young person to feel better and to ensure that they do not commit the offence again. As one young person explains,

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*‘yeah, with mine, with mine, what I did, my offence, I’ve actually, I spoke to them and she’s, she like described it to me and like I felt really bad about myself, that I made her feel that way. Erm, yeah, but, I think that’s how people would benefit from that, I did myself.’*

*(Female, aged 13-14 years)*

It was evident that meeting the victim and listening to their pain was experienced by some young people as a difficult, challenging and thought provoking way of addressing their offending behaviour. Another young person states,

*‘yeah, I didn’t like it at first to be honest, it was horrible going to the person I had to go to and standing, like just looking in their eyes and knowing what you’ve done . . . And I were getting a bollocking. [laughs] It was, it was horrible to be honest, and like, I didn’t like it at all but after it I thought, I thought at least I’ve apologised and all this, they know that I’ve done it myself and I’ve not, I didn’t write a letter or anything and it did look better in court because I didn’t end up getting as much’*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

Restorative justice was articulated by young people as a method to challenge their behaviour that had a significant impact on them. It could be achieved by YOT workers enabling the young person to have the confidence and humility to listen to their victim’s experience. For some young people this would be possible with minimal discussion beforehand, for others it could be achieved by challenging the young person on the particular offence before they met their victim and enabling them to think how their victim may feel.

There were though, some young people who were ambivalent about restorative justice or felt that it was not a good idea. This was normally because they the young person had been involved in a fight and believed that morally, because of the reason for the fight, they were in the right. Therefore, because they thought that they were justified in their violent behaviour, even though they were sentenced to a YOT order in the courts, they did not want to be involved in restorative justice, or to apologise for their actions.

*‘Well because I, er, sometimes you might just feel like if you’ve done summat for a reason and you, you strongly believe that what you did was right in your mind even though it was morally illegal, like illegal and that then it’s just, I don’t know, if you believe deeply in summat then you shouldn’t like just throw what you believe away just because the justice system says something different, so like there’s no point.’ (Male, aged 17-18 years)*

Some young people were strongly opposed to participating in restorative justice. This was mainly because they were attending a YOT and completing an order because of a violent offence, and they thought that bringing them together with their victim would only be a catalyst for more violence with the person. As this young woman explains,

*‘it didn’t happen but I don’t think it’s a good thing because like imagine if you, for example and you were like brought face to face would end up kicking off won’t it?’*

*(Female, aged 17-18 years)*

In sum, young people involved in violent offences were much more reluctant to engage in restorative justice. But others, who were marginally in the majority, had acknowledged that the experience of meeting their victim had made them think about the impact of their offending behaviour.

### **Community work**

Community work was thought of as a good way for reducing re-offending for just 9/23 (39%) of those that considered this issue. Those that thought it was a good idea liked being able to do voluntary work by putting something back into the community as recompense for their offending behaviour. This young person thought that undertaking community work was positive if it was evident that it was linked to improving the environment in the local community.

*'I've done it before, and like it's alright in it? . . . Like you can litter pick or like, do you know like the churches, graveyards and that. Clean them up, graveyards, and stuff like that'*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

The young people that felt community work had a positive effect on their offending behaviour, acknowledged that they were involved in an activity that was intended both as a punishment and reparation to their local community.

Some young people thought the best way to undertake community work was to make it voluntary and to have a specific purpose. They suggested it could be achieved by making it less like a formal punishment and more concerned with encouraging young people to do job that was rewarding and taught them some skills that they could transfer to future employment.

*'it could be like, you could volunteer once a week at say, I don't know, a charity shop, and there, obviously there's a lot of, of YOT kids or they could open a shop, their own charity shop, YOT could open it and all the proceeds go to like a chosen charity at the end of the year, and it, it could be summat like that because then they could employ all the youths and then they've got their own shop then where they can just say right, they, they'll have constant workers all the time, they'll be gaining experience in working with the public and stuff like that, so even just little things like that it, it'd help a lot with getting a job.'*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

Another young person stated how he thought it could benefit both the community and his future employment prospects,

*'I don't know,... Maybe not like a community service but like voluntary community work, [it's] good to put on your CV in it? Shows that you're willing to do stuff. The more you do, the more you're helping people, the more likely you are to get a job, because you, you've got that little bit of experience and you've got that want, to want to do like community work and stuff, so'*

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*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

The idea of participating in community work that provides an opportunity to develop young peoples' employment opportunities, whilst also being an opportunity to help people in their local community, albeit as a way of reparation, seemed to be a positive way to use this type of order. For others, it was a bad idea because they felt alienated when they were undertaking the community work and it made some of young people angry,

*'No I've never done it but what I've heard might, it just pisses people more off than anything to be honest with you.'*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

Others expressed that working in outside in the community, in what was perceived by the public, and felt by the young people as a punishment, was both humiliating and futile. They could not see the purpose of the work, and if anything it made them more inclined to re-offend. As this young person explains,

*'yeah, when I did, I did, I got forty hours and like a reparation thing, but luckily I've only done one, like one day of community work but thinking like back when I was like fourteen, whatever, walking past and seeing, seeing them all, like on a big van, like in their jackets just doing stuff you wouldn't want to do, and like I've experienced it myself and it's not nice, it's not nice'*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

Another stated,

*'Yeah, yeah, it's just like, but most people I know like it's just so boring, obviously that's their fault but like, they say, my mate's still got in trouble and he's done this loads of times, so I don't reckon it works.'*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

In sum, community work evoked mixed, but strong views. Some believed it was a good opportunity to constructively repay the local community for their offending behaviour. Whilst others believed it was a form of public humiliation that made them feel alienated and angry. Importantly, most young people did not feel that it would deter them from re-offending.

## **Prison**

Unsurprisingly, prison was thought of as a good way to reduce re-offending for only 9/25 (36%) of those young people that considered this as an option to help them stop re-offending. Those that saw some benefits referred to two main areas that helped them. Some thought that having a day that was rigidly structured and the opportunity to get some qualifications made the experience bearable. As this young person states,

*'I didn't reoffend. I got a lot of qualifications. know everybody goes to prison comes out with loads of GCSEs don't they?'*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

Others (7/25) suggested that whilst prison provided structure, food and maybe the opportunity to stop misusing drugs when they were released from prison they realised there were much more constructive things they could do with their lives.

*'So I thought when I got out I thought oh shit man, I'd rather be back inside, but then obviously I started getting stuff sorted and got my girlfriend and that and then since then just been, just chill out and not go back.'*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

For the majority of young people, prison provoked a negative response and many felt that it made the possibility of them re-offending even more likely.

*'But people say prison's actually wicked because actually you're like people there, but they say it's, they bully you and not. At the end of the day it's not. It's still not a good place though but, you know'*

*(Female, aged 15-16 years)*

The young people who were in a youth offending institute at the time when they were answering these questions felt that prison was something that they had to survive, to get through before they could be released and restart their lives again. However some felt that they were stigmatised and judged as 'criminals' once they had been sentenced to a period in a prison and that this limited their opportunities when they were released. One young person explains how it will have a negative effect on his chances of getting a job,

*'going to be hard getting a job these days, . . . look at our record, Prison. People say they don't judge you, but they do judge, but you have been in jail and that, and they do judge you.'*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

In sum, whilst a minority of young people explained some benefits of prison, training, structure and routine. Most young people believed that it made their lives more vulnerable to re-offending when they were released. Whilst they understood the element of punishment, they did not believe or experience prison to be a deterrent from re-offending.

**Consistent Practice Issue:** Ensure that all community work programmes provide an opportunity for the young person to develop skills and their self-esteem rather than just as using it as a punitive measure. This would involve community work developing young people's team work and communication skills, but also providing training opportunities in charities, businesses and shops.

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### 3.9 Participatory strengths-based approaches

Less than half of the interviews explored participatory ways of working in depth as some young people found these two sentences hard to understand on the cards we had written. However, when young people did engage with the ideas, they were strongly supported. ‘Asking you what help you need and giving you that help’ was seen a good way of reducing re-offending in 80% (12/15) of the interviews and was given a gold star by the group in custody. This was then an equally important element of YOT work as establishing good relationships between YOT workers and young people and YOT workers and families. ‘Help with learning how to sort out problems’ was slightly less frequently seen as good way to reduce re-offending, but still it was seen as important in 67% (12/18) interviews.

Asking you what help you need and giving you that help was described as obviously good:

*obviously that's good isn't it? Like ...it's like trying to focus on what you need in it?*

*(Male, aged 13-14 years)*

This is not an evaluation, therefore not a rigorous approach to identifying distribution of good practice, but it is very positive to note that in their discussions of this issue, 11/15 young people described their YOT workers as being effective in giving them the sort of help they asked for when they needed it.

***‘INT: when you say to your worker ‘this is what I need’, does she do it?’***

*Yeah. She gets, she gets straight on it, better than my Social Worker anyway. [laughs]’*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

*‘they can't always help you with everything, but what they can help you with they do help you with, like if you give them a reason to help you and you show that you're willing to do as you're told and, and you're willing to, to change and show them that you're changing then they'll be willing to help you as much as you want. ‘*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

*‘they helped me apply for like hairdressing and stuff, she [worker] starts me on training and what you do to get you into that place so start training.’*

*(Female, aged 17-18 years)*

No young person said they had received no help from any YOT workers. However, one young person said he’d never been asked what he needed:

*‘Like they ask you what to do and stuff like that, well yeah, [that’d be good but no one has asked really]. But I’d have to think about the answer really.’*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

For some young people, having a worker who actually responded to their requests for help was in marked contrast to their experience of other adults in their life.

*'all my family, they've always told me that they'll do stuff and they've never done it, but that's, I think that's why I get on with her so well because she like, when she says something she sticks to it and does it, instead of like saying oh we'll do it next time or, or we'll do it in a few weeks, she actually says that things that she'll do she'll actually do it.'*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

However, receiving consistent and reliable help was not always provided by all workers, as two young people pointed out variance in practice. For example:

*'I got up [To go to an appointment] and made the effort because she said that she'd [go with me] and ... I've walked all the way from [two miles away] to YOT and I got there and she was like 'Oh, I can't go'. I was like well why tell me [you could come]? So I was just like, you know, "I'm not coming back [to YOT]". I didn't go back, and I got took to court like four times for not going. ... I if she said [earlier] that she wouldn't do it. I would... just've thought "Right, okay". But it would have given me more time to get somebody else to come with me, but ... [she had] actually a week to tell me that she weren't coming.'*

*(Female, aged 17-18 years)*

One young person also pointed out the amount of help he got depended on the size of the problem he presented, but that every problem seemed big to him and threatened to spark his short fuse:

*'I mean obviously [worker], she's helped me to, not avoid but deal with major problems, you know, like any problems that I feel I might get stressed with, but she's, you know, I mean she has, she's bordered [on not helping with] the small problems, it's just because of how my nature is with a short, such a short fuse, every problem seems to be a major problem.'*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

Two young people said they should not get help as they needed to do things for themselves:

*'Because my [worker], said to me you've got do this, you've got to do that. It's only me that can actually do it, deep down and I do know that.'*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

Four others said they didn't have any problems.

Three young people suggested that being given the help you need is achieved by YOT workers following up on requests for particular aspects of support that young people initiated, by giving information or setting up opportunities, for example:

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*'I've told her like I aren't, I like art and she, yeah, I've told her I like art and she goes you can go to [service name].'*

*(Female, aged 13-14 years)*

This might also involve, continuing to support young people's initiatives even when the young person themselves struggled to attend commitments they made but not applying pressure, as this young person described:

*'She fixes appointments for me there and, I missed them so far though ... but she's taken me to that, where I went yesterday, therapies and stuff... They don't, they're not like putting pressure on you, you know, or nothing, so they're really nice.'*

*(Female, aged 17-18 years)*

Being participatory also means enabling young people to identify the issues that they saw as problems, and building on their existing skills and resources to help them make the changes they wanted to make. In this way YOT workers could intervene at just the right time to offer advice that would get to the heart of the problems which were leading to offending behaviour:

*'Like I, I had a bit of trouble, there were some lads kicking off and I didn't know what to do, I felt a bit stuck in middle. So [worker] said "well why don't you just stay away for a couple of weeks, let everything chill out and go home?" And it, it was sorted, know what I mean, I didn't expect it but the best thing to do were just walk away and they guided me in that direction, which were the, the best bet, saves arguing, it saves fighting and confrontation and stuff like that.'*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

Sometimes providing the resources a young person might need could be other sources of support and specialist services:

*'Er, but it'd be a bit better say if they had like someone from the Job Centre, like coming in, like it goes back to like the benefits and that or someone, someone from, er, I don't know, colleges and stuff like that come in'*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*

In some situations the support young people needed was more communication or change of venue.

*'it'd be better if they come to your house instead of you coming down here, that'd be a lot better....[they could also text] because it shows that they care about them and they're worried.'*

*(Male, aged 17-18 years)*



Enhancing young people's strengths could also involve using the emotional awareness skills that have already been described in 3.5 above.

*Help with learning how to sort out problems. Yeah, help with learning how to sort out problems is a good thing as well because it helps you get it out your head and if you share it, it helps you even more.*

*(Female, aged 13-14 years)*

*'They used to say, say like, school, shit at home, I used to get very annoyed, she used to say like "Breathe".'*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

Sometimes the practical support required might be extensive, but could help young people change some significant issues about where they were living and who they were associating with.

*'if you just go back to your area where everyone's doing exactly the same and nothing will change to be honest. ... I probably would have chosen, yeah, like when I come out [to move to a different area]... that's what you need in it, to make new friends.'*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

Practical support could also be quite simple to provide, such as transport, but there were inconsistencies in practice in this area. For example, two young people suggest they should be given help with transport, as they did not receive it.

This was in marked contrast to comment from THE SAME YOT area team, who said:

*'if you bring bus ticket and all that, they'll give you bus money back'*

*(Male, aged 15-16 years)*

This discrepancy in practice over whether or not and which transport costs were paid was repeated across the local authority. For some young people it was not an issue, as they had a bus pass from another source, but for others, access to transport would have helped them to help themselves in increasing their attendance at YOT and other activities.

**Consistent Practice Issues:** Develop a consistent policy across the authority about the payment of transport costs for attendance and other activities. Ensure this is followed consistently in all teams.

**Recommendation:** Consider enabling young people to take a greater lead in their engagement in YOT, where possible encouraging them to identify their own problems and potential solutions, then providing the support necessary to make these changes.

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## 4. Conclusion

The research identified examples of good practice in working with young people, across all of the teams. There were examples of some services and opportunities being available in some areas but not in others, such as stronger links with specialist education and employment services. There were possible indications of different ethos between teams, for example, some appeared to take a greater focus on engaging with families than others.

The consistent practice issues identified in the report provide indications of where the key discrepancies arise, but we appreciate that workers locally may have a different (and valuable) perspective, and that some differences in practice are the result of differences in circumstances. We would therefore recommend further consultation with workers to establish what support and resources they would require in order to develop consistent practice across the authority, drawing on the indications of possible inconsistencies that we have noted.

In addition, the young people have made some strong recommendations for developments in service provision within YOT:

- Consider developing a plan with key recreational facilities in the region – sports centres, gyms, cycle tracks etc - to ensure that all young people have the chance to access and participate in constructive leisure activities whilst attending the YOT.
- Colleges and young person’s education and training centres must provide places on their courses for young people attending YOTs on a mandatory basis. This would mean that every young person who attends a YOT would be guaranteed a place on an education and/or training course. Consider, in discussion with the relevant education services, how this might be implemented.
- Consider setting up a peer-mentoring scheme through which young people can meet in groups with other young people who have successfully stopped offending (following the suggestions for practical details outlined above by young people). Pilot and evaluate this scheme in one area and spread it across the five teams if successful.
- Consider enabling young people to take a greater lead in their engagement in YOT, where possible encouraging them to identify their own problems and potential solutions, then providing the support necessary to make these changes.

And, these recommendations for health services:

- Counselling and substance misuse services need to be available in young person friendly or non-stigmatising venues close to where they live. Consider developing drop in or self-referral routes, so that young people can contact services at times of crisis.
- In light of the first recommendation for YOT, above, consider whether health services can help resource young people’s access to sporting facilities as a means of improving and maintaining their emotional health.

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## Appendix – Research Activities

This cards that follow on the second page of this appendix can be used to conduct games and activities through which young people can discuss ideas about what helps reduce offending. The activity undertaken should be chosen by the young people taking part in the interviews or small group discussions. It is best to limit the group size to no more than 6 participants.

### Game 1 – Group setting or pair

Spread out all of the card face down on the table. Give the players a counter that represents them. Go round the group and ask them to choose one card for themselves, and to put their counter on it. It is a game of risk. When the players are choosing, they are trying to guess which is going to be a good card. A good card is one which they think will really work in helping young people stop offending. During the game, the players award points to each card by debating how many points it should have. 100 per cent for a fantastic idea. Zero per cent for a terrible idea that will never work. The whole group take part in this, but they have to come to some consensus about the point. If people have opposing views the scores they should be added together and divided to give an average score. The aim of the game it to get as many points as you can.

Everyone present should play the game. Once everyone has chosen a card, they take it in turns to turn it over and give it points.





### Top tips

Players may talk up their card even if they don't believe it. This is usually countered by others talking it back down, but each person has to justify their arguments with examples. A player who is thought to be exaggerating can be challenged by anyone in the group. A facilitator should be aware of the emotions of the group players – some people need to win, and if they are vulnerable it is more important that they be allowed to win this game than that the scores are accurate. Due to these tensions, we develop group consensus further at the end by asking the group in a non competitive way, to arrange the cards in a hierarchy of 3. top ideas, 2. may or may not work and 1 don't think it will work. The data analysis is qualitative not quantitative, so it is the discussion which really matters. The analysis is mindful of whether different things are said in the non-competitive setting.

### Alternatives

If participants prefer they can just do the second part of the activity as described above, picking up and discussing any cards they are willing to talk about and talking about why and why not they think they would work, and what need to happened for them to work really well for themselves and others in different situations/ how they can be made to work better.

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Being listened to and respected 	Help with your hobbies 	Helping you get a job 
Meetings with other young people and ex-offenders 	Structure and routine 	Rich people give more money to poor people
Help with friends and family – parenting skills	YOT worker getting on well with your parents	You getting on well with YOT worker
Worker doing hobbies with you	Help with education or training	Help with drugs or alcohol

Help with learning how to sort out problems	Mentoring	Help with benefits or money
Restorative Justice	Counselling	Help with where you live or getting somewhere to live
Getting a girlfriend/ boyfriend	Prison	Community work
Asking you what help you need and giving you that help 